

Mass Media and European Cultural Citizenship

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Abstract. The main thesis of my article is that the viability of the European Union does not depend so much on its political structure as on its being anchored in a culture-based public sphere and on the establishment of a cultural European citizenship. The public sphere could be defined as an unique world, characterized by consensus and cooperation, in which only public goods can be sought and acquired, or as an unique world, characterized by rivalry and competition, in which everyone could pursue their private interests, but only if there is a consensus regarding an objective and fair procedure. In any way, we cannot speak of a pluralism of public spheres – like the black public sphere, the LGBT public sphere, etc. – but (at the most) a plurality of interests represented in the public sphere, under the reserve of respecting a fair procedure, which allows the expression of axiological judgments. The EU needs a progressive citizenship, from civil citizenship to cultural citizenship, depending on the acquired skills, behavior and virtues. One deserves cultural citizenship and have the right (or, perhaps the privilege) to manifest – in the public sphere – a way of life and a cultural identity only if promote authentic values: virtues, rationality, free will etc. The problematic aspects of the European media sphere are obstacles on the way to establishing an authentic European cultural citizenship. They can be kept under control by assuming a healthy reactionary attitude and associating every element of change and contingent progress (speed, reductive simplicity, user's solitude, pictoriality, lateralness, data overload, immediacy, segmentation, social amnesia, etc.) with an element of moderation and equilibrium. Only thus can the media contribute in the making of a viable union of the European peoples, grounded on a well articulated European cultural citizenship.

Keywords: public sphere, mediasphere, progressive citizenship, cultural citizenship, civic skills, civic behavior, civic virtues

Having as landmarks moments like Paris (1952), Rome (1958), Brussels (1967), the Schengen Agreement (1985), the Single European Act (1986), Maastricht (1993), Amsterdam (1999), Nice (2003) and Lisbon (2007), the integration process of the European peoples seems to confirm the idea that the results of human actions are only partially intended and carried out by their authors. Friedrich A. Hayek said that a capitalist economy is the result

of human action – more precisely, the result of the efforts of thousands or millions of workers, consumers, entrepreneurs, inventors, marketers, and business managers of all kinds – but not of human design. (cf. DiLorenzo, 2008) Similarly, one can say that the integration of the European Continent is not a social engineering project elaborated and implemented by an elite of technocrats, but the result of the more or less convergent actions of a multitude of social actors: politicians, political parties, trade unions, companies, religious organizations, consumers, press trusts, immigrants, pensioners etc. The European Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and the European Union took shape due to the strategic actions of visionary European leaders, but their efforts came to fruition – in shapes more or less similar to those planned – only in the context of complex historical factors, out of which the most important seem to be the horror generated by the World Wars (also viewed as civil wars within Europe), the decrease in the dependence on the economical (not military) help from the U.S.A., the fall of the Berlin Wall, de-communization of Central and South-Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Nowadays, the declared main aim of the European Union is to create an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen as well as to ensure peace, prosperity and freedom for its citizens in a fairer and safer world. These goals are founded on the values and commonalities shared by the majority of Europeans – Greco-Roman tradition, Judeo-Christian ethics, Renaissance humanism and individualism, Enlightenment rationalism and science, civil rights tradition, democracy and the rule of law, etc. – and are pursued by the help of means such as free circulation, goods, services and capital, the common currency, as well as the agricultural, fisheries and regional development policies.

Naturally, it is important for the European Union to adopt the adequate political structure – *federatio*, *confederatio*, *consortio* or *condominio* –, depending on the present situation of the European Continent and on the will of its inhabitants. (By the way, some of the ideas found in Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn's writings (1943, 1952) and his reflections on reactivating – as a model of political structure – the Holy Roman Empire might constitute a point of debate in this context.) However, the viability of the European Union does not depend so much on its political structure as on its being anchored in a culture-based public sphere and on the establishment of a cultural European citizenship.

Given the abundance of specialized literature and the simultaneous presence of heterogeneous viewpoints on the significance of the terms „public sphere“, „citizenship“ and „culture“, we shall confine ourselves to producing a partial and one-sided, but also consistent viewpoint on the problems announced, with the conviction that with sufficient reasons, other perspectives can be assumed as well.

Situated at the intersection of the normative-descriptive, monism-pluralism and spatializing-deterritorializing axes, the perspectives on the public sphere (Baiocchi, 2003; Gripsrud, 2007; Lauristin, 2007; McGuigan, 2005; Trenz, 2004; ...) can be harmonized through successive negations, starting from the concept of „private sphere“. *Grosso modo* the private sphere of any individual is defined by four rights relative to other humans: (a) the right to ban groundlessly the presence of other people, (b) the right to keep certain information secret, (c) the right to evaluate oneself according to one's own criteria and (d) the right to ignore external norms. For example, anyone inside their family home can avail themselves of the attributes of the private sphere to (a') to ban – without any reason – the access of a stranger to their own home, (b') to keep their charity deeds secret, (c') to appreciate their baldness superlatively (d') to decide freely how many minutes they keep their feet in cold water before going to bed. In the context of the private sphere, all individuals follow their own way to happiness, according to strictly subjective judgments, so that the notions of irrationality, abnormality and perversity don't belong here. Being characterized by axiological neutrality and pluralism, the private sphere depends on the fact that the individual avails himself of the rights to closure, opacity, self evaluation and self control, and his peers acknowledge these rights.

In contrast to the private sphere, the public sphere takes shape where individuals acknowledge their peers the following four rights: (a) the right to be present or to participate, (b) the right to know what is going on, (c) the right to judge actions by means of inter-subjective criteria and (d) the right to impose the observance of communitarian rules. Thus, the activities of a city's mayor certainly have a public dimension, insofar as (a') he cannot arbitrarily ban the access of citizens (especially journalists) in the perimeter of the institution he is running, (b') he is obliged to inform the persons, institutions or organizations with which he interacts on the organizational diagram of the town hall, human resources, financial resources, available space etc., (c') submits to the judgment and evaluation of ordinary citizens, opinion leaders, non-governmental organizations,

juridical institutions etc. (according to political, legal, performance criteria) and (d') acts within the boundaries imposed by certain legal, professional, moral constraints.

If the simple setting in contrast with the private sphere doesn't seem clarifying enough, we can add the restriction that social agents situated in the public sphere communicate and act only on public goods or interests, not private ones. To put it simply, goods can be considered public if and only if they cannot be given to someone without being given, in principle, to everyone. In other words, goods are public if and only if nobody can prevent the others from benefiting from it. The use of public goods essentially excludes rivalry and competition. Much as somebody may benefit from public goods – highways, parks, public transport, security, social peace etc. –, his/her fellow citizens can benefit to the same extent. (Steiner, 2001: 21) Furthermore, public goods behave like Mises' goods of a remoter or higher order, because they satisfy some wants indirectly when complemented by the cooperation of other goods. (von Mises, 1966) The stability and cohesion of a society directly depend on the quantity and quality of the public goods it offers, independent of their nature, material or spiritual.

By contrast, goods or services are private if and only if they are destined to the exclusive use of a certain individual or collectivity. When one takes possession of private goods – automobiles, deodorant, TV set, airplane, job, computer etc. –, one prevents one's fellow citizens from using it. Private goods acquired by an individual can be considered as lost by everyone else. The exclusive character of private goods makes the effort of acquiring them take place in a climate dominated by envy, rivalry and competition. The quantity and quality of available private goods influences directly the vitality and dynamism of the respective societies.

Obviously, if we restrict the public sphere to the „playground“ of collective rights to opening, transparency, external evaluation and external control, in which only public goods can be sought and acquired, we find ourselves in a very clear, but also very rigid normative perspective. The public sphere would be an unique world, free of rivalry and competition, characterized by consensus and cooperation, where everyone can value their potential, develop their personality and live a virtuous life. (Cunningham, 2002: 7) However, this ideal world would be utterly underpopulated, due to the fact that very few people have the power to rise above their private interests and undertake personal costs in order to obtain a common benefit, even if this benefit would contribute to

acquisition of new private goods. This is why, having as an ideal this model of public sphere, we can replace the imperative of pursuing only public goods with the obligation to observe – besides the collective rights to openness, transparency, external evaluation and external control – a fair and unanimously accepted procedure. Thus, everyone could pursue their private interests even in the public sphere and in competition with their fellow citizens, but only if there was a consensus regarding the “rules of the game“. Remarkably, in this perspective, too, the pluralism of private interests within the public sphere is doubled by the monism of the procedure followed. In other words, we consider that on the level of a society we cannot speak of a pluralism of public spheres – like the black/Latino public sphere, the LGBT public sphere, the women’s public sphere etc. – but a plurality of interests represented in the public sphere, under the reserve of respecting a just and unique procedure, which allows the expression of judgments of value. The axiological indifference is pertinent in the private sphere, but it is not recommended in the public sphere, because it infringes upon critical thinking, the exchange of information and the freedom of debates.

While we reject the idea of the multiplication of the public spheres depending on the personal or group interests represented, we consider it useful to identify certain ideal types of public spheres, which can help us diagnose the condition of the public sphere in a certain community and point out the type of public sphere desirable at certain historical moments. An interesting contribution on this problem belongs to Hans-Jörg Trenz and Klaus Eder (2004). Choosing as criteria institutional resonance and public resonance, the two authors determine four types of public spheres: (a) indifferent public sphere (permissive consensus), (b) mass public sphere (political protest), (c) elite public sphere (political campaigning) and (d) media-constituted public sphere (discursive politics).

		<i>Institutional resonance</i>	
		+	–
<i>Public resonance</i>	+	media-constituted public sphere (discursive politics)	mass public sphere (political protest)
	–	elite public sphere (political campaigning)	indifferent public sphere (permissive consensus)

The indifferent public sphere is characterized by non-responsive institutions and no claims for civic participation, the mass public sphere and the elite public sphere refer to the unilateral expression of resonance, and the media-constituted public sphere turns into a competitive public space which develops from the dynamics of public communication between outside protest and institutional responsiveness. (Trenz & Eder, 2004: 10) The last type of public sphere implies the interaction between a critical mass public and a concerned elite public through mass media. The symbolic struggle between the two sides (desirably) results in the elevation of the demands of the mass public and the legitimization of the actions of the elite public. The media-constituted public sphere is a sufficient condition for the viability of the European Union.

Usually relates to membership of the nation state, citizenship – in a democracy – „(a) gives membership status to individuals within a political unit; (b) confers an identity on individuals; (c) constitutes a set of values, usually interpreted as a commitment to the common good of a particular political unit; (d) involves practicing a degree of participation in the process of political life; and (e) implies gaining and using knowledge and understanding of laws, documents, structures, and processes of governance“. (cf. Abowitz & Harnish, 2006: 653)

In correlation with some particular rights, Kathleen Knight Abowitz and Jason Harnish survey four major types of citizenship (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006):

- political citizenship: the right to participate in the exercise of political power;
- social citizenship: the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society;
- civil citizenship: the individual rights to speech, faith, and property; and
- cultural citizenship: the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state's democratic processes.

Far from being only juxtaposed to one another, these types of citizenship make up a scale and mark thresholds of civic maturation of a society. For example, we believe that the process of building a society of high civic conduct begins by guaranteeing the (natural) rights to life, freedom and property (civil citizenship), continues by guaranteeing the right to actually take part in the political life (political citizenship) and is

crowned on the one hand, by assuring a general level of welfare (social citizenship), and on the other hand, by offering the possibility to manifest one's specific public identity in relation with the dominating nationality in a society (cultural citizenship). The progressive character of citizenship is pointed out by the problems caused by ignoring the hierarchy of the types of citizenship. Thus, in an immature society, insofar as the civic values are concerned, social citizenship is understood as an absolute right to an ever increasing share from the fruit of the work of the others, and cultural citizenship is associated with the right to injure civic, cultural or religious sensibilities of the silent majority, and with the privilege of not being the object of axiological judgments in the public sphere.

Officially introduced through the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and viewed as a complement of national citizenship, European citizenship is, in its turn, correlated with a set of rights:

- the right to travel, live, work and study in every country of the EU;
- the right to vote and the right to stand in local and European Parliament elections;
- the right to submit a petition to the European Parliament or to European Ombudsman in relation to maladministration within the EU institutions;
- the right to diplomatic protection; nationals of one Member State can benefit from the protection of any other Member State, outside the EU.

Without denying the benefits brought by these rights, we believe that they don't justify the use of the concept of "citizenship", not even on the primary level of civil citizenship. The said rights are, on the one hand, lacunar, as they do not guide the members of the European Union towards the ideal of social citizenship, and especially, cultural citizenship, and on the other hand, excessive, because they are not correlated with acquiring knowledge, aptitudes and conducts. For example, the act of exercising political power on the level of the EU has very serious consequences, but it is available to all citizens with the right to vote, be they ignorant, incapable or vile. However, considering that the status of citizen is at least as important as the one of secretary, it ought to be granted progressively, depending on the adoption of desirable knowledge, capabilities and conducts. Obviously, we aren't talking about a contest for the position of citizen, but about the need to educate – compulsively, if necessary – those who want to manifest the rights attached to a certain type of citizenship. Certain institutions of the European Union might educate those who want to make use of the rights corresponding to a type of citizenship in the idea

of acquiring civic virtues (self-sacrifice, patriotism, loyalty, respect etc.), civic skills (the capability to dialogue, to work in a team, to negotiate, to build consensus etc.) and civic behavior (behaving in a civil manner, being fiscally responsible, accepting responsibility for the consequence of one's actions, practicing civil discourse, becoming informed on public issues, voting, taking action on public issues, providing public service, etc.).

In a more rigorous scenario, the said institutions might allow the fructification of the rights and privileges attached to a type of citizenship only on the condition of compliance to minimal standards. Obviously, as long as any individual has the natural right to life, freedom and property, civil citizenship is to be granted unconditionally to all members of the European community. However, the transition to the following types of citizenship is to be correlated with the compliance to certain terms. For example, those who want to exercise political power would have to prove eminence on the level of civil citizenship – by scrupulously respecting their fellow humans' right to life, freedom and property – and, furthermore, they would have to make proof of their capability to cooperate with the others in the field of public interest, according to a just procedure of public action. If these conditions are not taken into account, the political life may degenerate into a fight for conquering the privilege of despoiling the others *legally*. The transition to social citizenship would mean the acquisition of new skills and behavior patterns, like the capability to assume the consequences of an action or the availability to self-sacrifice oneself for the good of fellow humans. By prematurely and unselectively granting the rights corresponding to social citizenship, the forming of a class of infantile people dependent on public help would be encouraged. Eventually, the right to manifest one's way of life and specific identity in the public sphere isn't the attribute of some clamorous minorities, but the *privilege* of the bearers of an authentic culture. If cultural citizenship is granted unconditionally to noisy and aggressive minorities which either cannot, or do not want to live in consonance with the authentic values that prevail in a society, we must expect the emergence of a sectarian society in which there are strong group affiliations but few norms dictating how people should behave. Under the pretext of offering hospitality to established minorities, a society can become inhospitable towards the majority that gives it consistency.

Therefore, cultural citizenship implies cultural pluralism, but not the cacophony of pseudo-cultures. The intercultural dialogue is possible only between kindred entities, anchored to a common foundation. The

cultural essentialism I may be accused of concerns the principles that ensure the connection between cultures, and not the cultures themselves. Without being solidly rooted in a set of universal principles – rationality, free will and virtues – no connection between cultures is possible. The so-called incommensurability and irreducibility of cultures renders the recognition of a culture impossible.

Subsequent to civil, political and social citizenship, the European cultural citizenship can be grounded on a few elements which improve the essential parts of the human nature (*id est* rationality, free will and virtues): Greco-Roman tradition, Judeo-Christian ethics, Renaissance humanism and individualism, Enlightenment rationalism and science, civil rights tradition, democracy and the rule of law. The various cultures through which the European cultural citizenship manifests itself – depending on language, dialect, race, religion, region etc., but not on gender, hobby or sexual orientation – are necessarily consonant with the values previously enumerated and constitute stability factors in the European media-constituted public sphere.

Simultaneously viewed as a particular industry or conglomerate of corporate organizations, but also as a set of dynamic communicative and culturally constituted relationships, the media creates a sphere of its own – the *mediasphere*, that is a critical culturescape in which meanings flow through various channels of human and technologically enhanced modes of communication (Lewis, 2006) – and that influences substantially and ambivalently both the European public sphere and cultural citizenship.

Next, we shall dwell upon a few problematic aspects created by the traditional and especially the new or alternative media on the level of contemporary society and implicitly, on the level of the European Union: (a) speed, (b) reductive simplicity, (c) user's solitude, (d) pictoriality, (e) lateralness, (f) data overload, (g) immediacy, (h) segmentation (Barber, 2001) and (i) social amnesia (McGuigan, 2005).

Each of us has experienced with annoyance the imperative of reflecting immediately upon and to answer promptly to the received messages, given that healthy judgment and responsible action need time and patience. But in the context of harsh competition on the media market and of the media consumer's unquenched thirst for novelty, journalists create and send messages without proper documentation on the phenomenon under investigation and without taking some time for reflection. A suitable example is the media coverage of the recent global

economical crisis. The high speed at which the events unfolded surpassed the journalists' capability of accurately reflecting the situation.

Paradoxically, while social problems are more and more complex, the analyses and decisions are phrased in Manichaeic style, removing all the nuances. Politicians, leaders of opinion, pollers, journalists etc. ask us to answer by "Yes" or "No" to questions that entail many other specifications. News organizations, operating in an increasingly competitive market, have fought to raise productivity and maintain audience share by cutting editorial budgets and popularizing news content. Investigative, contextualized journalism and coverage of complex debates and policy-making have thus made way for scandal, 'infotainment', personality-led news and public relations material. (Aeron, 2003) The reductive simplicity answers to the new imperative: „Maximum simplicity of expression, maximum simplicity of reception! “

Much though one may gloss on the theme of virtual communities and of the advantages of surpassing geographical confines, one has to admit the fact that the new medias isolate and atomize individuals. People in front of the TV screen do not interact with real individuals, but with their surrogates. And without personal contacts, there can't be a social life and an authentic public sphere.

The new media favor the image and the sound to the detriment of the text. But the public sphere and the cultural citizenship can thrive only where the blind force of emotions is tempered through words. The destructive potential of pictoriality is illustrated by the effects of TV shows such as „No comment“, which emotionally manipulate millions of people. The „authentic“ scenes showing the burning of a flag, hysterical crowds, faces disfigured by hatred, fights etc. have a greater impact than many rational and well-documented discourses.

Many researchers think that the new types of media will stimulate the replacement of „pyramidal“ hierarchical structures by flattened structures, serially correlated. Thus structured, the communities in question would become more hospitable, as the differences of status would be mitigated. Whereas a few decades ago criticising the sovereign meant committing lese-majesté, nowadays, no insult is small enough for those in governing positions. However, one can ascertain that people feel the need for healthy hierarchical structures, based on reason, respect and affect. No wonder that the most highly regarded institutions by Romanians and not only by them have a strict hierarchy and are somewhat not democratic: the Army and the Church.

As to data overload, let us remember that the value of a product is given by its scarcity. The more abundant, the less valuable data is, and the slogan „You have knowledge, but what use is knowledge?“ is extremely suggestive here. The duty of politicians, journalists and other leaders of opinion is to draw meanings, lessons or guide marks out of the available information, thus turning it to good account. The media receivers must not be presented with data which exceed their capability to structure them in a coherent picture, but with a „map of meanings“ allowing a beneficial interaction with the type of media.

The two following aspects new technologies impart to society concern the dissolution of filtering and control instances and the undermining of traditional communities based on neighborhood, kinship, mutual assistance relationships. Without filters, standards and borders, it is practically impossible to maintain a functional society. The normative connections between people imply judgments of value, rules, rejection provisions etc., which regularize the acquisition of available objects for the members of a culture. For example, it is of utmost importance for the health of a community that its members do not wish for the same objects. For instance, it is desirable that the employee shouldn't have the same wishes as his employer, the pupil, as his teacher, the patient, as his doctor etc. But the media has undermined these confines and prohibitions, so that, with the heightening of the social mimesis phenomenon, everyone wishes to be on a par with his neighbour, whatever the knowledge, abilities and resources they possess.

Finally, journalists are often agents of social amnesia, only interested in the latest thing, according to the principle „Old news is no news“. (Mcguigan, 2005) The focus on breaking news undermines the tradition of a community and deprives of significance the actions within the public sphere.

The problematic aspects of the new types of media are obstacles on the way to establishing an authentic European cultural citizenship. They can be kept under control by assuming a healthy reactionary attitude and associating every element of change and contingent progress with an element of moderation and equilibrium. Accordingly, the „dynamic“ factors discussed above – (a) speed, (b) reductive simplicity, (c) user's solitude, (d) pictoriality, (e) lateralness, (f) data overload, (g) immediacy, (h) segmentation and (i) social amnesia – should be combined with the following inhibitive factors: (a') pauses for information, reflection and meditation, (b') context, (c') new affinities, (d') rhetorical phrases, (e')

sound hierarchies, (f) meanings, (g) new types of relationship, (h) intermediation, and (i) tradition. Only thus can the media contribute in the making of a viable union of the European peoples, grounded on a well articulated European cultural citizenship. This superior form of citizenship would be gradually and responsibly assumed by each European citizen. But lacking the „soul“ of cultural citizenship, the European Union will disintegrate, just like many other voluntarist creations of social engineering.

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